

ROLE OF THE *MASJID* IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT: PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF EVIDENCES FROM ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The *Masjid* (Mosque in English) has historically played a vital role in the spiritual, moral and social upliftment of the Muslim community. Nevertheless, the role of the *masjid* has remained largely undocumented, and unrecognised in the development and disaster studies. Although the role of the *masjid* in disaster situations in many Muslim countries is evident, very little study has been undertaken to document its role as a development agent. Hence, investigating the potential of the *masjid* in disaster situation is an effort to describe and explore the functions and roles of a mosque in responding to a disaster. It has been remarked that the *masjid* has the potential to play a role in disaster management in early warning systems, as an information centre, an evacuation site and even with contingency planning. The role of the *masjid* during emergency response has received appreciation from the victims and the community. However, the potential has not yet been fully explored. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to explore and document the role the *masjid* has played in disaster management in various Asian countries and based on it develop a model of the potential role, the mosque can play in building the community resilience for disaster management in the Muslim countries.

Keywords: *Masjid*, Disaster management, Community resilience, Muslim countries, Contingency planning, Evacuation

INTRODUCTION

The *Masjid* is not only a physical edifice, it is also a community-based religious institution which historically has been a focal point where political, social and religious activities are organized for the community. *Masjid* allows Muslims to perform their personal, social and cultural responsibilities and provides a scope

to perform their solidarity duties to society. In many Muslim countries, during natural disasters *masjid* played important roles in collecting charity in the form of money and goods, organizing the community or as a place of refuge among others. In a nutshell, *masjid* has historically played a vital role in the spiritual, moral and social upliftment of the Muslim community. Nevertheless, the role of the *masjid* has remained largely undocumented, underestimated and overshadowed in the development and disaster studies literature (Cheema, 2012). Therefore, this paper intends to investigate and document the role the *masjid* has played in the disaster management in various Asian countries and based on it develop a model of the potential role, the *masjid* can play in building the community resilience for disaster management in the Muslim countries.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The theoretical perspective of the present study is based on the relationship between faith-based religious institutions and development, and disaster management.

RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT

Development studies have traditionally neglected the role of religion. The relationship between religion and development has changed overtime. In pre-modernism era, it was thought that religion and development are not conducive. With the advent of modernism, which is based on the philosophy of reason and the supremacy of science, religion was viewed as anti-developmental. The modernisation theory with its explicit goal of economic growth, was believed to go hand in hand with secularism; modern rational values would replace ‘traditional’ (therefore assumed as backward) world-views and beliefs (Lunn, 2009, p.939). From this perspective religion was seen as an impediment to economic advancement, irrelevant for modern societies and something that would fade away in time. In post-modernism era, there has been revival in the interest and role of religion in development through three dimensions – religious organisations, religious values and religious world-views. The following remarks indicate the relevant context-

“Both modernist and Marxist viewpoints which have influenced theory, policy and practice over the past 60 years strongly determined the neglect of religion in Western-driven development. However, despite their assumptions that it would fade away or become irrelevant over time, religion has continued to be a significant and in some cases strengthening factor across all continents. This cannot be ignored in the present or future development theory, policy and practice” (Lunn, 2009, p.947)

RELIGION AND DM/ DRR

Despite the fact that the integrative approach to disasters has attempted to consider social, cultural and economic factors since the 1980s, the role of religious institutions remains over shadowed and underestimated in the disaster studies literature along with the role of religion itself (Candland, 2000; Chester, 2005). Although often ignored in the development and disaster studies literature, religious institutions have been contributing to different phases of disasters including response, recovery and rehabilitation at the local level, where religion has significant influence in shaping perceptions of vulnerable communities (Chester et al., 2008). During times of disasters, religious institutions contribute to the disaster mitigation drive in a number of ways such as feeding hungry victims, providing shelter and supporting the communities holistically, along with other stakeholders. Religious institutions have played an important role in developing social cohesion by building social and safety networks within communities (Bano & Nair, 2007; Candland, 2000). Wisner (2010, p.81) asserts that religious communities, groups, institutions and leaders have an “untapped potential” for the task of disaster risk reduction at the local level. He emphasises that religious groups and organisations are usually the first responders because of their immediate availability and strong local networking. However, he identified the need for engagement of religious communities in community preparedness for disaster prevention so that the untapped potential of these communities could be used for saving lives and reducing vulnerability and economic losses. (Cheema, 2012, p. 39).

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this paper is to explore and document the role the *masjid* has played in disaster management in various Asian countries. The following objectives have been set for the study:

- A. To explore the Islamic worldview about disasters.
- B. To investigate the role of *masjid* in the different DM phases of the community.
- C. To document the preliminary DM role of *masjid* in selected Asian countries.
- D. To develop a model of the potential role, the *masjid* can play in building the community resilience for disaster management in Muslim countries.

ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW ABOUT DISASTERS

Traditional believe in religions consider disasters as acts of God (Allah) or disasters are God's will or expression of His wrath. It should be mentioned that no statement by the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) ever mentioned that earthquakes or other disasters are expressions of the wrath of God or the result of disobedience or infidelity. Instead there are many statements that show the need to prepare for disasters and prevent from happening (Ghafory-Ashtiany, 2009, p.219)

An analysis of the verses from the Qur'an, reveals that Islamic teaching can be adapted to the principle of disaster risk reduction among religious societies. The most important part of God's bounty to human beings is His guidance, ability, wisdom and knowledge, given in order for people to do good deeds and based on knowledge and cognition, the effects of "good deeds" and "bad deeds" on construction, community and environment can be summarized in general form as presented in Fig.1.



Fig.1. Relationship between our acts and protection against disaster (Source: Ghafory-Ashtiany, 2009, p.229).

Figure 2 shows that by following the Islamic teaching and principles, people can realize themselves and in religious terms, as the ultimate goal is to reach heaven. In this world “heaven” means productive, safe, healthy, happy and peaceful life (Ghafory-Ashtiany, 2009).



Fig. 2. Islamic perspective on achieving safety, development, vitality, akin to achieving heaven following the God's guidance. (Source: Ghafory-Ashtiany, 2009, p.229)

In the case that people perform bad deeds and do not follow the path in Fig. 2, their punishment is destruction and loss of life which will result in disaster, as shown in Fig.3. In other words, bad deeds which are carried out on the basis of ignorance or negligence and without using appropriate logic, in theological language are called “sin”. Thus, losses and disasters mainly result from people's bad, incorrect and inappropriate deeds. This is the simple explanation of the concepts and statements that disasters are resulted from sin. Hell, which is the result of sin, refers to a life with misery, destruction, lack of community development and so on (Ghafory-Ashtiany, 2009).

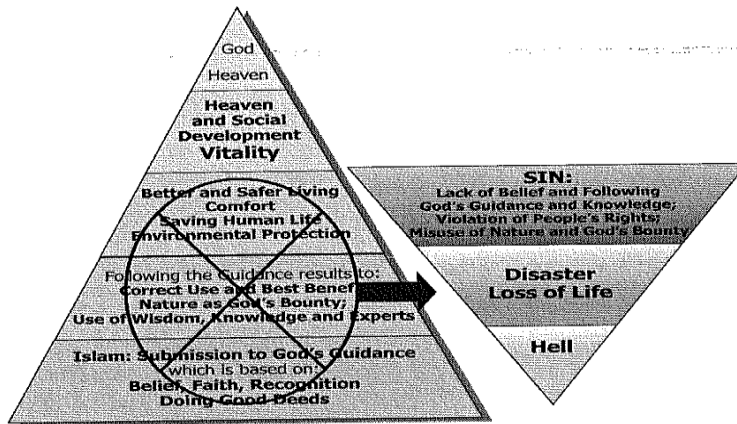


Fig. 3. Islamic perspective on disaster, loss of life and other damages, akin to hell (Source: Ghafory-Ashtiany, 2009, p.230)

DISASTER MANAGEMENT CYCLE FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

The conceptual framework of flood disaster management is built on three basic concepts - community, disaster management cycle and resilience.

Community- the term community means a group of people who gather together based on common interests and goals, and they have social bond which unites them into a community. Community can be small or large based on type of interests.

Disaster management cycle – the process relates to all activities which cover planning and mitigating disaster at before, during and after the disaster. The purposes are (i) preventing the loss of lives; (ii) relieving human suffering; (iii) giving information to people and authority about risks and (iv) preventing the damage of major infrastructure, possessions and loss of economy. In practice, disaster management activities are divided into three stages. Stage-1 is predisaster which includes prevention, mitigation, vigilance and early warning. Stage-2 is during disaster which covers emergency response, search and rescue, emergency help and evacuation. Stage-3 is post-disaster recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction which can span from medium to long term activities.

Resilience – the term is defined as a capacity of the community or members of the community to withstand disaster risk.

Avianto Muhtadi (IRI-UNOCHA-LPBINU, 2011) has developed an Islamic perspective of disaster management cycle (Fig.4), the elements of which have been supported by Al-Qur'an and *Ahadiths*. There are four phases in which Al-Qur'an clearly makes reference about sustainable disaster management. These are – prevention, mitigation, vigilance, emergency response, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Concerning prevention, Surah Al A'raf [7] verses 56-58 explain that human are not allowed to make damage on the face of the earth. This prohibition covers all areas including *muamalah* aspects, such as intruding the source of living and other people's subsistence (Surah Al Qasa [28], verse 4). Based on the lessons learned and best practices from the history of prophets, it is revealed that there were mitigations and vigilance as explained in Surah Yusuf [12], verses 47-49. Efforts that were made by Prophet Yusuf (RA) about saving his people and citizens from surrounding countries whenever there was a severe draught, which lasted for seven years. What prophet Yusuf did was mitigation effort in case of a disaster and it was a lessening effort of disaster risk. Surah Al Maidah [5], verse 2 explains about helping each other in emergency situation and Prophet Muhammad (SAW) uttered a hadith which states the importance of human to help each other (Hadith narrated by Muslim).



Fig. 4. Adaptation of disaster management cycle based on Islamic perspective.

(Source: Avianto Muhtadi, 2011)

Regarding the efforts of rehabilitation and reconstruction, Surah Ar-ra'd [13], verse 11 explains that humans are given the capability to interact socially, to coordinate programs or activities with multi-stake holders in multi- sectors, so that disaster management can be done comprehensively. Al-Qur'an also states that efforts of rehabilitation and reconstruction must obey these principles - 1) increasing public awareness about the cause, symptoms, and handling, so that they would not get the same risks; 2) giving appreciation of tradition (*al-'adah muhakkamah*), culture and local geniuses, so there wouldn't be any friction in the society; 3) cultivating patience and hope to survive, without reducing the readiness to do self-correction and introspection and to prevent despair. (Surah Yusuf [12] verse 87).

With regard to the operational actions in disaster management cycle, success will depend on the resilience mechanism in the community just like the role of a Mosque has functioned by itself. That natural social mechanism can occur because the community has parallel world view with the significance of that disaster relief. Through that view, they can feel directly "what is the best thing to do" when the disaster strikes. As mentioned by Abdullah (2008, referred in IRI-UNCHA-LPBINU, 2011), disaster relief requires speed and approaches based on the particular situation in the field, including operational mechanism that involves its resources, like a Mosque.

The above conceptual framework can be used in flood disaster management where the *Masjid* as a faith-based community organization, can play an effective role as a harbinger in the disaster management in flood-prone countries of Asia. Cheema (2012) in his study has documented the roles of *masjid* in different phases of the DM cycle (Table 1).

Table 1. Roles of *masjid* in different phases of DM cycle

Roles during response and relief	Roles during recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation	Role influencing preparedness
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initial contact point 2. A space and forum for coordinating response and relief efforts 3. Ensuring the inclusion of the vulnerable 4. Socially integrating forces 5. Recruiting of volunteers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support for livelihoods 2. Psychosocial support, spiritual healing and creating resilience 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Influence on disaster risk perception

Source: Cheema (2012), p.127

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the stated objectives of the paper, the methodology adopted for the study is discussed in the paragraphs that follow. The study is a desktop research and it is based on secondary information pertaining to the documentary evidences in the Asian countries. The role of the *masjid* and its committee played a variety of roles both before, during and after the disaster, which have been described and narrated in news paper, bulletins, journals, government documents. These information form the basic data of the study and they are carefully analysed, in order to arrive at some generalisation. Furthermore, the documentary evidences have been processed and analysed to prepare a model about the potential role of the *masjid* in disaster risk reduction (DRR) in the future.

CASE STUDIES

Documentary evidences on masjid and DM gathered from secondary sources have been structured under the following headings:

Evidence from Afganisthan

Disaster Preparedness through Mosque

Source: International Rescue Committee, 200

The waters of River Kabul feed the crops that Imdad Khan grows in his fields. It is the lifeline of agricultural activities of the area. But every year during June and July when monsoons rains strike the region, the rising waters of the Kabul river turn into a foe for Imdad and his fellow villagers. Recurring floods have been the bane of the lives of residents of Mutabar Kuroon. Not only their crops get destroyed but heavy and incessant rains damage their houses, leaving them without shelter and causing loss of income and other assets. The absence of any early warning mechanism or disaster management capacity at the community level or at the local authorities' level compound the miseries of the affected population.

But this year (2007), Imdad Khan and his fellow villagers were better prepared to cope with the floods. Due to Imdad's training with IRC he knows how to monitor rising water levels

through using local knowledge and when and how to inform the community so that they can take necessary measures. It was noticed that the village mosque with its central location and loud speakers can be used to make announcements for early evacuation of the village. A mosque in a traditional muslim village is not only a place of worship but is also a place where community members meet and share information. So a mosque is quite often used to make announcements about different issues related to the community and its members.

This is exactly what Imdad Khan did this year. Being the chairman of the Emergency Management Committee established under IRC's project, he was responsible for monitoring the water levels of the surging river due the rains. "One day when I noticed that the water level was increasing at a great pace, I sensed danger and ran towards the village to warn the people. I remembered the drill that I had learnt in training sessions and went straight to the mosque and made announcement on the loud speaker." says proud Imdad Khan.

With the use of the mosque's loud speaker, more than 1000 household were warned in time who were not only able to save their lives but also their precious belongings and household items.

Bangladesh has been prone to many natural disasters. Each year people suffer from particularly flash flood and chilling winter. While disaster preparedness is important to curb the impact, emergency responses are equally important to help people adjust with the trauma. Children, widow and women suffer most during disasters. They need strong and special support. Masjid Council strongly engages itself in emergency responses after any disaster occurs. Masjid Council works in partnership with communities and in line with government's instruction. Masjid Council provided significant responses after all major disasters. Individual supports constitute the major resource base for emergency response.

Apart from natural disasters, Masjid Council provides special support to the extremely needy and poor people to overcome special difficulties. Particularly many poor people seek support to manage marriage of daughters and health care cost and Masjid Council tries to respond to these appeals though its resource base is very limited. Last year Masjid Council

distributed warm clothes (About 500 blankets, 1000 chadors and 10,000 sweaters) among the poor people in 11 districts.

Evidence from Bangladesh

Emergency responses through masjid council

Source: <http://masjidcouncil.org> surfed on 08 October, 2013

In 2011, IRI-OCHA-LPBI NU undertook a study to examine the potential role of the mosque in disaster situation in Indonesia which involved six mosques in two provinces. The preliminary finding of the study indicates positive roles the study mosques played during disasters in different parts of the country. The survey showed that 83.5% from 1,307 respondents stated that a mosque should not only be a place of worship. 84.2% respondent encourages that a mosque should be used for non-religious activities too, like being the centre of culture, economy, social and education. The operation should adapt to the prevailing social system in the community surrounding the mosque. The study identified six tactical steps of mosque's role in disaster situation. These include – (a) providing facility and accommodation, (b) storage and siatribution of donations from volunteers and actuators, (c) coordination of mosque and government officials, mosque and other mosques and musallah and mosque and the actuators from outside the community, (d) organizers and executors are cooperating with coordinated parties, (e) encouraging public participation to help victims, and (f) psychosocial therapies with personal or institutional approaches through sermons and mauidhatul hasanah.

Evidence from Pakistan

Cheema (2012) explored the roles of mosques in three communities – Banda-1, Banda-2, and Banda-3, in rural setting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake and found that although there were local differences due to community characteristics, there were broad similarities in the roles of mosques and imams, in disaster management at the community level. Table 2 summarises the findings.

Table 2. Role dynamics of *masjid* in study communities of Pakistan.

Role dynamics	Study communities – Banda-1, Banda-2 & Banda-3
Cultural Bridging cultural gap between different disaster management actors and the local community.	All mosques served as an entry door for civil society, private sector & government organisations coming to help and work with the earthquake affected communities. Mosques and Imams acted as facilitators and bridges to introduce and build rapport between development partners and host communities. This was essential to win support of communities and to avoid friction and conflict between outside organisation and local communities.
Psychosocial Influence on disaster risk perception and attitude towards disaster preparedness Spiritual well-being, healing and resilience	All Imams had a critical role in shaping disaster risk perceptions through the institution of the mosque. The mechanism for influence included sharing views in public, delivering open talks and Friday speeches. The earthquake was strongly interpreted as an ‘act of God’ through references from religious narratives. This interpretation, although useful for creating resilience, hindered practical steps to adherence to safety measures such as building code. Mosques provided religious services such as Imams leading prayers and teaching the Koran to children. All communities noted that they were advised by mosques to stay calm and resilient, help each other and refrain from creating disorder and stealing, since it was a testing time for them. All communities greatly acknowledged the psychosocial and spiritual support provided by their Imams through private and public counselling. This healing directly contributed to the resilience among communities.
Economic Sharing of market information	All mosques provided a social space to make collective economic decisions such as harvesting of crops and sharing information about availability of employment opportunities and seasonal labour in local markets in the aftermath of the earthquake.
Social Women – exclusion and inclusion Bridging information	In all locations in the case study, women were not seen to be using mosques as physical places. Mosques did not have a provision for women to be able to pray with the congregation, although women desired this. Women said they would use mosques as emergency shelters in case of a future earthquake. The mosque as an institution supported women’s involvement in culturally appropriate activities such as stitching and midwifery training.

gaps	All mosques helped bridge information gaps among different actors, including civil society, private sector and the government. All mosques were frequently utilised by all actors to make public announcements through loudspeakers and through word of mouth. Women received information through direct announcements from the mosque and through men and children.
Community welfare	Imams of Banda-1 & 2 did not engage in activities outside mosques as it was deemed inappropriate by the communities they served. But in Banda-3, in addition to religious services, the Imam of the mosque engaged in acts of general welfare such as voluntary teaching in the local school and motivating the community to help each other after the earthquake.
Networking with other actors – civil society, private sector & government organisations	In Banda-1 & 2, Imams responded to civil society, private sector and government organisations during the DM cycle, but did not engage pro-actively. Imams provided some advice to development organisations looking for marginalised (widows & elderly) and the poor to support them in cash and kind. In Banda-3, the Imam was pro-active and actively engaged with all actors during DM cycle.
Influence of a community's perception of the role of the mosque and the imam	In Banda-1 & 2, communities did not like the use of mosques for non-spiritual purposes such as public meetings, nor imams performing general welfare functions. In Banda-3, the community was supportive of the role of the mosque and the imam allowed non-religious activities such as community meetings in the mosque. The imam was involved with development organisations.
Political Interaction with public representatives	In Banda-1 & 2, mosques and imams had no interaction with political figures. In Banda-3, the mosque, through its imam, had constructive collaboration with local political figures during the recovery, reconstruction, and rehabilitation phases.

Source: Cheema (2012), pp.152-53.

DEVELOPMENT OF A PRELIMINARY MODEL OF DRR WITH THE MASJID

Based on the case studies discussed in earlier sections, it appears that a preliminary model of faith based organisation such as a

masjid in DRR can be developed and this has been attempted in Table 3.

Table 3. Roles of community-based religious institution such as masjid in disaster risk reduction

Disaster phase	Roles the masjid can play in DRR
Preparedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence people's perceptions of disaster risk and behaviour on the basis of religiously-inspired worldviews. • There is a diversity of beliefs about disasters within religions but generally religions uphold belief in fate which does not necessarily construct believers as inert. • Influence people's choices regarding what is socially and culturally appropriate for a community.
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very often forefront provider of shelter and food to disaster victims because of their grassroot position. • Motivate and prepare volunteers to different tasks including removing victims from debris and ferrying injured to hospitals.
Relief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide local leadership which promotes sentiments of mutual sacrifice, charity and inspires communities to help others on the basis of divine promises.
Recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main source of psychosocial support, spiritual healing and resilience by providing a meaning to life and death with religious interpretations. • Build social cohesion and safety networks critical for saving lives and reducing vulnerability. • Support of religious institutions earns broader community involvement, participation and trust and therefore, their engagement increases the chances of success of projects.

Source: Cheema (2012), p.51.

CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the instances pertaining to the role of masjid in selected Asian countries and found that the masjid has played an important role in the different phases of disaster management cycle in those countries. Based on the evidences, a preliminary model of the masjid's potential role in the preparedness, response, relief, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phases of the disaster management has been

developed with detailed identification of the functionalities. Nevertheless, it is emphasised that further research works are necessary for the final development of the model. Finally, it is commented that -

“Religious bodies and authorities need to be engaged and listened to; religious beliefs and practices that might affect disaster relief and recovery must be identified. Religion, though not always positive, can be a source of resilience for millions of individuals and communities – a resilience that must be acknowledged if we are to help people in the midst of disaster” (Reale, 2010, *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, issue 48, October, p.5).

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